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ABSTRACT

Many factors that affect second language learning (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and cultural) can be addressed with counseling intervention. The Department of Student Development at Kingsborough Community College, New York, includes counselors who specialize in different student populations. Students are placed in a block program in which they share an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher, speech teacher, counselor, and content area teacher. Counselors teach courses that address such issues as college procedures, acculturation, study skills, test taking skills, stress reduction, and career choice. Each ESL class is attached to one specific ESL counselor. Counselors are available for individual referrals and teacher consultations. Individual counseling sessions help students develop awareness of their own emotional responses and learning styles. Students who must remain in ESL classes for longer than usual are provided with special, more intensive services. Tutoring is available from rigorously trained and supervised tutors. Counselor-led English conversation groups allow students to speak English while expressing their feelings, fears, and frustrations. (SM)

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ESL Teaching in Collaboration with College Counseling

Judith Brilliant

Many factors that affect second language learning can be addressed with counseling intervention. These include cognitive, emotional and cultural issues.

Cognitive issues

Cognitive issues affect the ability to learn and how best to teach different students. Learning style and modality preference need to be considered. Auditory learners will pick up the rhythm of the language more easily, the sounds, what words feel right in combination with what words. Kinesthetic learners need more of a focus on speaking and interacting. Processing styles present as a continuum. On one extreme, they may simply be learning preferences, but, often, areas of learning disability for which the student was able to compensate in the native language become more marked in a second language.

Tolerance of ambiguity also plays apart in response to language instruction. Some people are not overly disturbed by not knowing. These students may enjoy figuring things out on their own. Other people need a map. These students need to know exactly what the rules are. They need to see what is a head of them clearly and may become very anxious when things are not clear. These different styles relate to the controversy about the whole language approach vs. teaching correctness (which would seem to be less controversial for a while every time one or the other approach is in vogue). From my perspective as a psychologist and college counselor, different approaches are effective for different students.

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Emotional issues

Many authors see the process of adjusting to immigration as an inverted "U." Initially, there is a sense of confusion accompanied by excitement. At around the third year, many people become depressed. By the fourth or fifth year, there tends to be a more positive adjustment. The student's position in this process will effect openness to learning.

Identity issues impact on second language learning. Language defines how you order your thoughts and how you see yourself. Fears of challenging self perceptions create resistance to the new language. This is particularly true within the process of adjusting to a new culture and life style. When people are in transition, it is a natural reaction to cling rigidly to familiar ways of thinking in order to maintain some sense of groundedness. Such students retain their language of origin as the only language that is perceived as meaningful communication and use English words as symbols for the more meaningful language. This is evidenced in writing that reflects the rhythm and syntax of the language of origin, although the words are English.

Feelings of loss, guilt, and depression also interfere with acquisition of English as a second language for immigrant students. Letting in the new language can mean letting go of the past and of the people you left. For many students, accepting the new environment feels like abandoning those who were left.

The process of immigrating is differently difficult at different ages. One of the issues that has been seen in students who immigrated during adolescence, is that since they are at a time in life where fitting in with peers is paramount, and since they initially feel so isolated from peers, they often imitate the most obvious aspects of American adolescence in an attempt to blend. Unfortunately the most obvious aspects may also be the most irritating to adults.

Cultural Issues

Acculturation issues affect the context in which students attempt to learn. Expectations for learning, behaving in a classroom, test taking, note taking, and interacting with teachers differ among cultures. These things affect classroom functioning, language learning, and ability to express what has been learned. Aspects of the wider culture affect the culture of the classroom, as well. For example, in the United States, a culture that has few remaining boundaries of privacy, teachers often ask students to write about their personal lives. Students from cultures where it is unthinkable to talk about personal issues publicly, have been known to make up intricate personal experiences order to avoid revealing personal family information while answering the questions they were asked.

Differences in behavioral expectations in the classroom are especially evident regarding defining "cheating" in the classroom. While, students from all cultures will say that they were taught that cheating is wrong, the extent to which it is seen as wrong may range from the equivalent of theft to the equivalent of jaywalking. In cultures in which affiliation is a primary value, helping your friend is considered a virtue and the fact that an authority may perceive it as punishable does not change that perception.

Educational systems in many countries place a high emphasis on the teacher as authority. This is problematic in the adjustment to American education in a number of ways. In the American college classroom, learning is seen as an interactive process. Students are often grouped and expected to learn from one another. ESL instruction is often supplemented with tutoring. Students from some countries may respond with resentment. Their perception is that

they are getting second best. They see interactions with peers or with tutors as a waste of time.

Similarly, for many students, learning is the act of memorizing what a teacher or a text book presents. When they are asked to write opinions or interpretations, they are often confused about expectations. I have frequently heard students ask, "What opinion am I supposed to have?" The response is that students should write their true opinion and that it is the quality of the writing that is evaluated, not the opinion. But teachers should be cautious about the possibility of unintended conflicting communications. While we encourage students to be expressive, we must also attend to our own reactions to opinions that reflect cultural values with which we disagree.

Interventions

Specialized ESL counselors.

The Department of Student Development at Kingsborough Community College includes counselors who specialize in different student populations. The ESL counseling area now includes three full time and four adjunct counselors. Traditionally we have seen students for individual academic, personal, and career counseling, but in recent years we have been working increasingly collaboratively with the ESL teachers and we have developed new programmatic approaches for ESL students.

Blocked programming and teaching teams

The Intensive ESL program is a grant-funded program developed by ESL teachers in the Deportment of English. In their first semester, incoming freshmen are placed in a block program in which a groups of students share an ESL teacher, a speech teacher, a counselor, and, in all but

the lowest level, a content area teacher (psychology, sociology, or history). The counselor teaches two one credit courses, "Freshman Seminar" (Student Development 10) and "Career and Life Choices" (Student Development 11). These classes address issues including college procedures, acculturation, study skills, test taking skills, stress reduction, and career choice. These classes are offered to all students, but sections in the ESL Intensive program have been modified to meet the needs of ESL students and their involvement in the block program.

Intensive program teachers meet regularly as a team to coordinate curricula and to monitor the students' progress. So, for example, when I discuss test taking skills, test anxiety and appropriate test behavior, I can time it with the students first academic area test. Or when the ESL teacher tells me that this class is not getting the concept of writing summaries, I can discuss with her their fears of letting go of what they are afraid may be important details, we can brainstorm about instructional presentations that may alleviate the problem, and I can also introduce the idea of summarizing in my Student Development class when we talk about study skills. When problems with individual students emerge, the teacher and I can discuss teaching approaches and I can see the student individually to address personal issues.

Non-intensive ESL classes

Since the intensive program has been successful, this year we added more coordinated counseling intervention to classes that are not part of the program. Each ESL class is attached to one specific ESL counselor. This way, the students know which counselor they can meet with if they need to and the teacher knows who can be approached with problems with students as they arise. Linking whole classes to a specific counselor also allows the counselor to address interpersonal and group dynamics issues.

Counselors are also available for individual referrals and for teacher consultations for students who have completed ESL classes. Students do not shed their issues and ambivalences as soon as the course title is "English" instead of "ESL," so we consult with English instructors and see students they refer as well.

Individual sessions

Individual sessions with an ESL counselor often focus on helping students develop awareness of their own emotional responses and learning styles. Some specific strategies may include visualizations, relaxation techniques, or individual "homework" assignments. For example, a student may be asked to go to a store where English is spoken and ask a question, or ask a question in a content area class, or try to spend ten minutes daily not translating internally, or keep a journal in his or her native language, or listen to news radio in English. Tasks are determined by the individual dynamic. The object is to discuss the process of attempting to complete the task rather than just to complete it. This way, there can be no failure and whatever happens is informative.

Frequent repeater program

Each semester, there are a few students who seem to be forever stuck in ESL classes. Much to their own frustration and that of their teachers, they attend the same level repeatedly and do not seem to learn. Over the years, we have developed a formalized process to address these students, which, for lack of more glitzy terminology, we call "the frequent repeater program".

Students are referred by teachers, themselves, their friends, or are noticed when counselors assist them with advisement for registration. We work closely with Special Services because teachers sometimes perceive a student as having a learning disability when there are

immigration stress or acculturation issues, and, on the other hand, when ESL counselors work with students, hidden learning disabilities are often discovered.

The student is asked to see the Director of ESL counseling and to bring two essays. First the student is asked a protocol of questions. Some questions are: How long have you been in this country? Tell me about the day you got here? Your first day in school? Did you come with your whole family? The counselor observes the emotions the student expresses and can understand what was the experience was like for the student

There are questions that provide a description of patterns of learning. When you were in your country, what were your easiest and hardest subjects? Were there problems learning how to read or write in your own language? Other questions address opportunity to use the English language as for communication. When do you speak English? What radio and television do you listen to? What language do you think with?

The counselor reviews the student's essays. The focus is not on specific English issues, but on the process. Writing may reflect the syntax of the native language, or errors found when words by word translations are used with a dictionary. These kinds of errors may reflect emotional barriers to integrating the language. The quality of spelling errors may reflect phonic confusion, difficulty with auditory processing, or visual memory errors. The organization of ideas in writing may reflect fluid thinking that suggests emotional issues or cognitive problems independent of the language in which they are expressed. The student's ability to learn from feedback is evidenced in changes with each draft. Does the student mindlessly plug in words as he or she was told? Does the student show conceptual understanding of changes? The counselor may address the student's reactions to feedback? Can he or she accept feedback without feeling

angry, attacked, or humiliated? The student is often given "homework." This way the validity of the counselor's assumptions can be evaluated and the efficacy of different techniques can be judged.

Once there is a sense of what's happening, there are a number of interventions that can be used in any combination: Individual counseling, consultation with teacher, individual tutoring, participation in a counselor-led English conversation group.

Tutoring

At different times, we have had one or two tutors in this program, but tutors are rigorously trained and supervised. Tutors meet one hour weekly for group supervision conducted by the Director of Special Services with the tutors in the Special Services program. Teaching approaches for students with learning or other disabilities are often very effective for students who are learning a second language. They also meet one hour weekly with Writing Center tutors in order to have the perspective on teaching that is provided there. Additionally, tutors are supervised individually by the director of ESL counseling for one hour weekly. We discuss each student's progress, the interpersonal interactions in tutoring sessions, and modify teaching techniques as necessary. It is an extremely time intensive program, but these this is an extremely difficult population. These are students who repeated levels frequently or completed all their course work but can't graduate because they haven't been able to pass the writing placement test. Sometimes these students have taken this test semester after semester. They are depressed, angry, and hopeless. The regular ways of working with them have failed.

Counselor-led English conversation groups

The most popular and successful aspect of our program has been counselor-led English

conversation groups. While they provide the opportunity to speak English, they are counseling groups where students can express their feelings, fears, and frustrations. Since they are called "conversation groups" rather than "counseling," they do not present a threat to students who come from cultures where seeking help is shameful. Going to a counselor might be perceived as a reflection that one is damaged and in need of help, but a conversation group is perceived simply as a chance to have discussions in English. The counselors are flexible and supportive in their approach. Sometimes its group therapy, sometimes it's instructional, depending on the needs of the particular group at a particular time.

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